

**First Public Meeting
to Review the Taunton Bay Special Management Area Plan
Tuesday, February 5, 2008
Franklin Town Hall**

7:07 PM Sherman Hoyt welcomed and opened the meeting. Inquired if there were mussel, scallop, and kelp harvesters present.

Lee Hudson, Doug Kimmel, Slade Moore, Shep Erhart, Mike Briggs, Steve Perrin, & John Sowles introduced themselves as members of the Advisory Group. John noted that the Advisory Group was appointed by the Commissioner to get outside feedback from non-government people to make sure we are doing something that can work reasonably well in the community.

Rep. Rob Eaton, a member of the State Legislature Marine Resources Committee, pointed out the importance of local folks making local recommendations. He noted the hope that this project might be a model for the state with regard to marine resources.

Persons present introduced themselves.

John Sowles summarized the reason for the meeting. He noted that the Legislature has provided an opportunity for the management of the bay. We are proposing to enhance the resources in the bay while protecting the bays underlying ecology through the use of three methods: flexibility, scientific information, and local stewardship. The area of interest is above the reversing Hancock-Sullivan Falls. We are proposing that Taunton Bay be designated a "Special Management Area." Within that area, we are proposing to improve management of four species: scallops, urchins, mussels, and kelp.

Ken Webber: Didn't the closure go from the Bridge up?

John S: From a practical point of view, we want to include portions of the bay that do have urchins and kelp. For this to be a good experiment, we thought this would be a good experiment.

On July 1, the dragging closure is lifted. This proposal we are talking about tonight would open it up to dragging under certain conditions. We want to be careful to look out for the horseshoe crabs in certain parts of the bay; we want to avoid conflict with the aquaculture lease. We are trying to balance the cost and benefit of protecting the important species.

In order to fish in Taunton Bay, we are proposing rules to:

1. Protect the sensitive areas
2. Ensure the commodity is there
3. Provide information about the harvest, in confidential data

Heath Hudson: I want to make sure the plan is flexible enough so that just because a horseshoe crab was brought up once, the area will be closed. I am concerned that the food product will go to waste because a horseshoe crab happens to come up in the drag.

John S: I would be interested in the information that results from the bycatch, rather than to automatically increase a line of exclusion.

Slade Moore: described to the assembled group how research in Taunton Bay demonstrated that the local horseshoe crabs exist under conditions that warrant extra management attention (isolated populations, little chance of recruitment from outside of the Bay, marginal habitat, living at the northern extent of their range). He also mentioned that dragging for mussels has little history in the Bay, so we can't predict its effects.

Barbara Arter: Too much attention is being spent on single species issues. I am more interested in process.

Slade Moore: In support of a more holistic management style than was previously in effect, many species have been studied in Taunton Bay since 2001. Horseshoe crabs rose as one species particularly relevant to the current dragging issue because they share habitat with mussels.

Sherm H: We see this as a work in progress and are seeking information. We recognize the need to look at other species.

John S: How are we going to decide acceptable impacts to habitat? The answer is that John Sowles is going to look at the harvesters plan and look at where and when are they going to be harvesting and how this overlays with the sensitive areas.

Barbara A: So if someone wants to dive, the person would have to tell where and when?

John S: Yes. On the one hand, we don't want to be "heavy handed" but on the other, we want to be responsible and so we need to know what activities are proposed or intended so we can manage them.

Chad Purritt: There's only one area for urchins. I dive a lot there between the bridge and the falls.

John S: Would you have a problem asking before you dive?

Chad P: No.

Larch Hanson: You have an interesting situation with kelp. There is a little more pressure on kelp beds; they don't move around like animals. I get unhappy when the beds on the surface get torn up by dragging. Kelp beds have 3 layers: surface plants are 3-year old plants; if we want to have a sustainable kelp harvest, we need to work from the top down. Disturbing kelp from the bottom is not the best idea. It is important for kelp harvesters to be informed about these meetings.

Sherm H: Would receiving notice of meetings be helpful?

Larch H: Yes. In addition, new kelp harvesters should not come in except on an apprenticeship program; a few years ago I lost some kelp beds, I think to draggers. I think someone should have to go through an apprenticeship program to be allowed to harvest in Taunton Bay.

Darrel Young: I've heard of a beautiful kelp bed that was ruined by draggers.

James West: Everything goes in cycles. My father was one of the first ones to urchin. When I started there was a lot of sea urchins in the early 70s – millions of them. No market for them. Then they started being fished in the 80s. Back then there was a lot of them. The big ones got caught up. They laid on the kelp and the seaweed. They died off because they got overfished. It takes several years for them to grow. That's one reason they haven't come back. That's why there is lots of kelp around; nothing is eating it. That's changed the bottom of the ocean.

Eight years ago the mussels were there for harvesting; but the closure prevented it. Now they are not good for harvest. Beds disappear on their own through mother nature, with the freezing of the bay.

John S: Would you want to have a steady harvest, instead of this boom-bust cycle?

James W: I'm just a fisherman; it's all my family has ever done. I'm not for bay management because it's been eight years... it takes so long for something to come into effect.

Slade M: The bay hasn't been managed for eight years; it's just been in a state of closure.

James W: Being able to bring the harvest out during that time would have really helped.

Is this going to be open for anyone with a license? Or just for people in Hancock and Sullivan?

John S: It's proposed to be open to anyone, as long as they go along with the steps we propose. We are hoping that will discourage a flood of people.

James W: Are you going to regulate what is taken out? Quotas?

Sherm: We haven't thought about that.

Larch H: I've looked at aerial photographs and used those as a benchmark. I'd suggest you do that as a baseline.

Lee Hudson: I've been involved in this since the law was passed (2 days after my daughter was born 8 years ago). I'm hearing the same things. I have two ideas:

1. Those who have been harvesting scallops and sea urchins in the bay including divers and draggers get together and get some funding to see if they can use part of this bay to restore the sea urchin and scallop stocks.
2. I really think this group is getting too big for this type of discussion; I've heard most of these things before. We might have "focus groups" to discuss by species or areas; with

the advisory group linking them up.

Larch H: It's the same in my bay as it is here. You can see the kelp beds on the surface. The question is whether you will help us, or just leave us alone, so we can prepare for the next harvest? You have to look at the landing report to see where the kelp beds are.

Carol Korty: How do you regulate the number of people who come in? Suppose you get many more applicants than you can accommodate. How do you manage it?

Sherm H: That is the problem of fishery management. It is a huge question.

Barbara A: I'm more caught up in the process. I'd like to see a draft of the process to give us all a much better idea of where you are coming from. July is right around the corner. Someone who wants to drag where there is this fantastic kelp bed; what is your plan? Then we could pick at it in more detail. Maybe what you should do is put out a notice to everyone who is doing the harvesting and walk through it with them.

John S: What I am trying to do is step you through the process in general. But 'the devil is in the details.'

Steve Perrin: The moratorium was not a wasted time. We have learned a lot about the bay. For example, the dieback in eel grass, I think it was result of minimal runoff into the bay that increased the salinity of the bay. We are sadder, but wiser, as a result of the moratorium.

Frank Dorsey: The fact that you will report where you dragged, what you dragged, and when you dragged, will be a "defense" against being "blamed" for activities for which you are not responsible. [That a dragger, such as James West, would be blamed for damage to the bay.]

Sherm H? Would you be willing to do this kind of reporting process?

Darrell Young: Yes.

Chad Purritt: Like we do with the elvers now.

Darrell Y: Suppose someone gets caught up there without a log. You could have just a dollar license fee and get your log.

Sherm H: If you were fishing there without a permit, you would be caught.

John S: The DMR would enforce it.

Ken Webber: Then this is a State thing; not a Taunton Bay thing.

Sherm: This would be a harvesting permit. It would be enforceable by the Marine Patrol.

John S: In response to a question about other species - We are not ready to deal with the wormers

or lobsters.

Larch H: Let's say you get ten applicants for five areas? It is a road race; it makes for craziness. Is it a transferrable permit? I really don't believe in this process. We have an agreement among the harvesters and it works fine. How do you plan to give out permits?

John S: We were thinking on a first-come-first serve basis to those who can meet the conditions of protecting the bay, reporting, and so on.

xxx Webber?: That's a way to start a war among the harvesters. You've got to think about the worst that can happen.

John S: We don't want a horse race.

Larch H: We have a seaweed council that has worked this all out.

Barbara A: Would you be willing to let your seaweed gentleman's agreement be part of this process?

Shep Erhart: The first-come first-served basis isn't going to work for kelp.

Sherm: Will it work for mussels?

James W: Anybody can buy a license. I think you should be able to get a license to do whatever in the ocean. When Tomcat's landing is sold, probably to an out of state buyer; it'll be like the mussel factory across the bay. That should have gone to the Town of Hancock for public access. I don't know a fair way to manage the resource. James referred to the new scenic parking area and expressed his disappointment that a public water access was not installed instead.

John S: What about a lottery?

James W: Whoever won would be happy.

Shep E: What about getting everyone interested in the harvest every year and get them together to decide how to divide up the resource?

James W: Who's going to decide where the kelp is that is off limit?

Shep E: Things shift, so the kelp harvesters would decide every year. A stock assessment is an important part of it.

John S: Do I see a "Taunton Bay Harvesters Association"?

Lee H: The Seaweed Council has helped decide the use of research funds, specifically for aerial photographs of Taunton Bay. Rather than looking at the Advisor "making decision" they should look around for funds and resources to make available to the "Focus Groups" of people who

know information.

Steve P: The initial focus was stewardship. We need to focus on how to ensure the longevity of the harvest in Taunton Bay.

Barbara A: When we held the focus group session for the worm and clam harvesters, they came up with the idea of self-regulation in the Mudflat Management Plan. I encourage everyone to look at that plan. They want sustainability; it is the same recommendation. You need to get all the harvesters on the same page.

James W: I'm not sure how this is going to work in practice.

Sherm H: Can we get all the involved people in the room and work out an agreement, like the kelp harvesters do?

James W: I'm not sure what else you can do.

Darrell Y: We don't even know who goes in.

Barbara A: That's what we found in the study: people go in and then go away; they come and go.

Carol K: If everyone who put in an application were to meet, that might be a solution.

Lee H: If everyone who comes to the meeting gets to play; that's OK. There's an investment in doing the stock assessment.

John S: Is there anyone here who wants the State to just walk away July 1?

Larch H: We [kelp harvesters] are doing it by ourselves.

Lee H: I would choose "Nothing" rather than this process.

Heath H: Mussel harvesters would work together.

Sherm H: There will be a meeting of the Advisor's Group a week from tonight, February 12, at 6 PM.

Adjourned 9:15 PM.

Attendance List:

Lee Hudson
Heath Hudson
Ken Webber
James West
Steve Perrin

Angela Young
Darrell Young
Chad Parritt
Carl Korty
Slade Moore
Rob Eaton
Oka Hutchins (Ellsworth American)
Andrea Defrancesco
Shep Erhart
Barbara S. Arter
Mike Briggs
Larch Hanson
Adam Webber
Frank Dorsey
Doug Kimmel
John Sowles
Sherman Hoyt